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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000868

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SUBJECT: DAS KAIDANOW DISCUSSES POLITICAL REFORM WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

REF: BAKU 742 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Lu, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: EUR DAS Tina Kaidanow met with six leaders of Azerbaijan's civil society on October 23. All six agreed that Azerbaijan is headed in the wrong direction on democracy and human rights, and that USG support was needed on this issue. They highlighted support of youth as critical, including solving the problem of jailed bloggers Milli and Hajizade. Media freedom and lack of access to alternative information is also a large problem. DAS Kaidanow encouraged the continued activity of civil society and applauded their courage in pursuing their activities. She promised USG support for democracy and civil society in Azerbaijan and specifically for the two bloggers now in custody. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On October 23 EUR DAS Ambassador Tina Kaidanow met with six civil society representatives. After a welcome from DAS Kaidanow, Arzu Abdullayeva, chairwoman of the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly, began the discussion. She said that while Azerbaijan has a strong intellectual capacity, the level of democracy is low. There is no culture of democracy in the ruling party, and the government is a watchdog of its own power rather than the safety of the people. While upcoming municipal and parliamentary elections are important, there is no hope that they will be free and fair, and therefore the international community should not treat them as though they were. The Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict, however, is the only area where society and the GOAJ agree—neither will give up NK.

¶3. (C) Rasim Musabayov, a political analyst, agreed that there is not a positive trend in democracy and human rights in Azerbaijan. There is a negative trend on democracy in the entire post-Soviet region and this affects Azerbaijan. In addition, Azerbaijan feels safe from international criticism because of its strategic geopolitical location and its energy resources. The opposition has lost all power, and cannot balance the government. The only opponent to the GOAJ is civil society. Therefore the trial of jailed youth activists and bloggers Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade is very important; young people are ready to stand with them and if they are convicted, the situation could spiral out of control.

¶4. (C) Hikmet Hajizade, political analyst and father of Adnan Hajizade, thanked DAS Kaidanow and the Embassy for their support of his son. He said American education exchange programs work, as his son's case has shown, and that these programs should be increased. The young, western-educated

generation is the only hope for Azerbaijan, he maintained. DAS Kaidanow assured Hajizade that this case was being followed closely in Washington, and had been raised at the highest levels with the GOAJ; she noted she would raise it in a subsequent meeting with President Aliyev (septel recounts Kaidanow's meeting with Aliyev and discussion on this point).

15. (C) Emin Huseynov, Chairman of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, gave DAS Kaidanow a briefing paper on the problems in Azerbaijan's media. He highlighted the arrest of journalists, the blogger case, and the closure of foreign radio stations as the most significant problems. He stated that the democracy situation is getting worse in Azerbaijan because the country is on the eve of elections and the government is having problems paying pensions. Therefore, he said, they are making a strategic decision to obstruct and discourage the most politically active people. In addition, Huseynov stated that his media monitoring has shown that there are no alternative ideas in mass media. He concluded by asking for more substantial support for civil society from the USG, as there is potential for non-political forces to develop. If this does not happen, Huseynov said he believed that in five years Azerbaijan will look more like Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan in its overall lack of democratic development.

16. (C) Orkhan Gafarli, chairman of the youth group Azerbaijan Youth Platform, noted that corruption in the education system is endemic. In addition, drafting young people into the army as soon as they finish school causes a serious break in their educational development. He also said that the GOAJ is

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putting pressure on active young people because elections are approaching. Milli and Hajizade were attacked, in his view, because the GOAJ saw potential opposition in them. The outcome of their trial will have an enormous impact on youth movements, Gafarli asserted, and therefore he asked for USG help.

17. (C) Ilgar Mammadov, a political analyst, argued that Azerbaijan is currently making a large U-turn in its foreign policy, and is now becoming pro-Russian. Russia has made a large impact with its soft power over the last five years, and average Azerbaijanis no longer consider them the enemy, he said. Mammadov maintained that change in Azerbaijan will not come from within the government, but can only come from a source with moral authority beyond the control of the state that can sustain itself economically. This could come from religion, as it did in Iran in 1979, but Mammadov is hoping to build it through a coalition of democracy-oriented intelligentsia instead. He noted that his organization, REAL, is made up of Azerbaijanis, not foreigners, and people who are not corrupt and therefore could have moral authority.

18. (U) DAS Kaidanow has cleared this cable.

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